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# SUMMARY BRIEF

## State of the Field Report: Youth Education in Crisis and Conflict

This 'State of the Field Report' presents the latest research regarding youth education in crisis- and conflict-affected settings. The document is based on a review of more than 30 publicly available studies and in-depth interviews with nine key thought leaders in the field. Study authors held consultations with USAID subject matter experts and reviewed strategic documents from 14 major donor organizations.

This report is intended to inform the design of future USAID youth education programs in crisis- and conflict-affected environments, and guide USAID's Office of Education in setting priorities for youth focused research and evaluation. USAID also sees this document as contributing to the growing evidence base around youth education in these settings.

### Findings

Most education interventions in these environments are holistic with multiple components including:

- ✓ basic education;
- ✓ life skills training;
- ✓ workforce development;
- ✓ civic education; and
- ✓ recreation.

Findings suggest that the reviewed programs contributed to positive youth outcomes in the following ways:

- Improve access to basic education through the use of technology and by decreasing the distance between home and school;
- Result in improved reading, writing, and mathematics skills;
- Increase self-awareness and empathy, as well as, decision making, goal setting, and communication skills through life skills training;

- Lead to better self-esteem and lower levels of depression and aggression;
- Result in increased job placements for youth through vocational or entrepreneurship training;
- Increase tolerance and reduce participation in violent activities, especially if they include conflict mediation, peacebuilding, and psycho-social training or support.

The devastation a country or community experiences as a result of conflict or natural disaster can require a complete rebuilding effort. This presents a genuine opportunity to engage youth as leaders, to create institutions that better meet the needs of youth, and to incorporate the community voice. However, more research needs to be done on the impacts of these policy reforms and institutional capacity building efforts.



*A positive, nurturing environment that offers a safe space such as a school has been shown to mitigate violence and help in a youth's development.*

*~State of the Field Report: Youth Education in  
Crisis and Conflict, p. 6*

## Gap Areas In The Research

There are six areas that require further attention on this topic, including the need to:

- 1. Have more research, preferably using rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental designs.** A lack of safety, transportation, and accessibility to areas and populations of interest often hinder evaluation efforts in these environments. Mobility of populations is one of the most challenging aspects of collecting data.
- 2. Better understand what makes some youth more resilient than others.** A few select organizations appear to be examining the ways in which youth assets or strengths, both internal and external, may influence how young people adapt to traumatic experiences. Having more information on the skills and support youth need to excel in these environments is crucial.
- 3. Know what works at increasing youth access to education.** Many key informants stressed the significance of non-formal education strategies in addressing barriers to access. Offering services through more flexible approaches, sometimes using technology as a platform, has proven helpful in many cases but the evidence base is weak.
- 4. Know what combination of strategy components will result in positive outcomes for youth.** It is clear that a more holistic, cross-sectoral approach has been taken when serving youth in crisis- and conflict-affected environments. While basic education has been a centerpiece, other interventions have also been offered, such as health education, psychosocial support, civic education, and workforce development training. Although a few select organizations have collected data linking strategies to outcomes based on theories of change, most studies do not map out those causal relationships.
- 5. Have more information on what works to build youth friendly systems.** While there is a great deal of investment put into institutional and community capacity building in these contexts, there has not been enough research on the impacts of those interventions. This is likely due to a lack of strong measurement indicators.



*Youth as change agents in their own development can be tapped to achieve various positive outcomes for their communities and themselves because of their enthusiasm, energy, creativity, and motivation to make things better.*

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- 6. Better understand whether helping youth achieve positive outcomes will build country stability and mitigate violence.** Not enough research has been done to verify the linkages between shorter-term outcomes (e.g. education, employment) and longer-term benefits (e.g. stability, reduced violence) at the country level. The important larger question to be answered is whether such interventions will help to build peace and stabilize the community and country overall.

## Next Steps

Through its efforts to develop a youth-focused research and evaluation agenda, USAID is contributing to the base of evidence in youth education in crisis- and conflict-affected environments. We are committed to taking the issues addressed in this report to the next stage of development.